AVATAR

The Last Airbender

Show #220

BOOK TWO: EARTH
CHAPTER TWENTY: "The Crossroads of Destiny"

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ACT ONE

EXT. SKY - APPA'S BACK - DAY

As Aang and Sokka fly back toward Ba Sing Se, it's clear that Aang is really shaken up. Sokka is concerned.

SOKKA
So... what kind of trouble is Katara in?

AANG
I don't know. In my vision, I just knew she needed help.

SOKKA
It would be nice if your Avatar powers could be just a little more specific from time to time.

In the distance, they see an unusual trailing cloud of dust rising up from the ground.

SOKKA (cont'd)
What is that?

As they get closer they can see it's Toph, surfing a wave of Earth! They descend, and fly beside her.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Need a ride?

INT. PALACE - DAY

Azula addresses a large group of Dai Li agents. Mai and Ty Lee are nearby, still in their Kyoshi disguises.

AZULA
The Earth King and the Council of Five do not trust the Dai Li. They imprisoned your leader, Long Feng. Soon they will turn on all of you -- and eliminate you. Seizing power today is a matter of life and death.

Azula begins to pace the line of agents as she continues.

AZULA (cont'd)
This coup must be swift and decisive. The Earth King and each of the five generals must be taken out simultaneously.

Now she slows down, and looks each of the agents in the eye as she passes -- searching for any sign of disloyalty.

AZULA (cont'd)
Long Feng has placed you in my command while we overthrow the government.

She stops and cooly stares down one agent.

AZULA (cont'd)
If I sense any disloyalty -- any hesitation -- any weakness at all -- I will snuff it out.

The agent BOWS DOWN to Azula.

AZULA (cont'd)
That is all.

The Dai Li agents leave, as Azula confides in Ty Lee and Mai.

TY LEE
Nice speech, Azula! It was pretty and poetic but also scary in a good way.

MAI
Yeah I thought you were going to make that one guy pee his pants.

AZULA
There are still a few loose ends -- The Avatar... and my brother and uncle.

EXT. PALACE WALL - THAT MOMENT

Zuko and Uncle stand before the entrance to the Earth King's palace.

UNCLE
Many times I imagined myself here, at the threshold of the palace. But I always thought I would be here as a conqueror -- instead, we are the Earth King's personal guests, here to serve him tea.

Uncle smiles.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Destiny is a funny thing.

ZUKO
It sure is, Uncle.

Zuko puts his arm around his Uncle's shoulder, proudly. At that moment, a ROYAL GUARD greets them, and leads them through the massive archway.

EXT. SKY - APPA'S BACK - LATER

The kids catch up while they ride on Appa.

TOPH
So how did it go with the Guru?
Did you master the Avatar state?

AANG
Uh...

Aang hears the echo in his mind...

GURU (V.O. -- FROM 2.19)
If you leave now, you won't be able to go into the Avatar state at all!

Sokka sees he is distracted.

SOKKA
Aang, are you okay?

AANG
I'm great. It went great with the Guru -- I completely mastered the Avatar state. (AWKWARD CHUCKLE) Yeah...

INT. PALACE TEA ROOM - DAY

Zuko helps Uncle set up for a royal tea ceremony. Two royal guards stand nearby.

ZUKO
(sotto)
What's taking so long?

UNCLE
(sotto)
Maybe the Earth King overslept?

A number of Dai Li agents begin entering.

ZUKO
Something's not right...

The guards take up positions, surrounding Zuko and Uncle.

AZULA (O.S.)
It's tea time.

They see Azula enter now -- it's a trap!

ZUKO
Azula!

Zuko steps toward her, but is immediately faced down by a Dai Li agent.

AZULA
Have you met the Dai Li? They're Earthbenders, but they have a killer instinct that's so "Firebender", I just love it.

UNCLE
Did I ever tell you how I got the nickname "The Dragon of the West"?

AZULA
I'm not interested in a lengthy anecdote, Uncle...

UNCLE
It's more of a demonstration, really.

Uncle Iroh calmly takes a sip of tea -- then SPITS FIRE all around him in a circle, scattering the Dai Li so he and Zuko can make a break for it.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Uncle and Zuko run breathlessly through the palace, pursued by Azula and her Dai Li henchmen. The Dai Li launch Earthbending attacks at their fleeing prey, while Uncle and Zuko occasionally send a Firebending attack or try to create an obstacle to slow down their pursuers.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - DEAD END - CONTINUOUS

They come to a dead end. Uncle gathers the energy for a lightning attack, and BLASTS a hole through the palace wall. Looking outside, they see they are several stories up... but Azula and the Dai Li are close behind. Uncle leaps out of the hole in the wall.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

UNCLE
Ahhhhh!

Uncle lands with a crash on a topiary of a platypus bear. He looks back up to see Zuko hasn't jumped yet.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Come on! You'll be fine!

ZUKO
No. I'm tired of running.

ZUKO (cont'd)
It's time I faced Azula.

Zuko disappears from the opening in the wall and heads back into the hallway.

INT. PALACE HALLWAY - DEAD END - CONTINUOUS

Azula and the Dai Li have caught up with Zuko.

AZULA
You're so dramatic. What, are you going to challenge me to an Agni Kai?

ZUKO
Yes. I challenge you.

AZULA
(shrugs)
No thanks.

Azula stands there calmly. Zuko furiously launches a Firebending attack at her -- Azula doesn't even flinch, as two Dai Li agents immediately leap to her defense, deflecting Zuko's attack with Earthbending. She shakes her head and turns her back on him as he is quickly outnumbered and overwhelmed by multiple Dai Li agents.

EXT. SKY - ABOVE THE PALACE - THAT MOMENT

Aang, Sokka, and Toph approach the palace, and land in a central courtyard. The kids jump off of Appa and head for the Earth King's main palace.

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The Earth King sits at his throne, Bosco nearby.

EARTH KING
Katara's fine -- you have nothing to worry about.

AANG
But -- in my vision, I felt so sure that she was in trouble.

EARTH KING
Well, she met with the Council of Generals to plan the invasion. And since then, she's been off with your friends the Kyoshi warriors.

SOKKA
See, Aang? She's with Suki. They're probably back at our apartment right now, talking about makeup or something.

Aang relents, and nods.

AANG
Okay. Maybe you're right.

EARTH KING
Believe me, if there was any danger at all, Bosco's animal instincts would sense it.

They all look to Bosco, who BLINKS naively for a beat or two.

INT. CRYSTAL CATACOMBS - PRISON CHAMBER - THAT MOMENT

In an underground chamber made entirely of crystal, Katara is being held prisoner. Katara feels around the walls for an exit, but Earthbending is the only way in or out of here. Then, on the opposite side of the chamber, some of the crystals shift and move as an opening forms. A Dai Li agent enters.

DAI LI AGENT
You've got company...

A moment later, another agent enters leading in the new prisoner -- Zuko. Katara is shocked.

KATARA
Zuko!

He just stares back at her intensely, as the Dai Li agents leave, and close them in together.

INT. KIDS' APARTMENT - LATER

Toph, Sokka and Aang enter, closing the door behind them -- Momo flies to Aang.

AANG
Momo!

MOMO
(CRAZED CHITTERS)

Sokka looks around -- no one's home. Toph senses...

TOPH
There's no one else here.

AANG
Katara is in trouble, I knew it!

SOKKA
Oh no...

TOPH
Wait -- someone's at the door...

Just then, there's a KNOCK.

TOPH (cont'd)
Actually, I know who it is -- it's an old friend of mine. Glad to see you're okay!

Toph opens the door to reveal Uncle standing there. Sokka and Aang are stunned.

UNCLE
I need your help.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. KIDS' APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Uncle stands in the doorway.

AANG
You guys know each other?

TOPH
I met him in the woods once, and knocked him down. Then he gave me tea, and some very good advice.

UNCLE
May I come in?

Uncle enters and begins explaining.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Princess Azula is here in Ba Sing Se--

AANG
She must have Katara!

UNCLE
She has captured my nephew as well.

AANG
Then we'll work together to fight Azula, and save Katara and Zuko.

SOKKA
Whoa there -- you lost me at "Zuko".

UNCLE
I know how you must feel about my nephew. But believe me when I tell you there is good inside him.

SOKKA
Good inside him isn't enough -- why don't you come back when it's outside him too, okay?

AANG
Katara's in trouble -- all of Ba Sing Se's in trouble. Working together is our best chance.

Sokka knows he's right. He nods his approval.

UNCLE
I brought someone along who might be able to help us.

He leads them out to the porch.

EXT. KIDS' APARTMENT - PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

A CAPTURED AGENT from the Dai Li is tied head to toe, his mouth covered. Uncle, Aang, Toph, and Sokka (and Momo!) each strike a menacing pose to show they mean business. (E.g., Uncle holds a small fireball in his hand, or Toph crushes a rock to dust, etc.) Uncle removes the agent's gag.

CAPTURED AGENT
Azula and Long Feng are plotting a coup -- they're going to overthrow the Earth King.

SOKKA
My sister -- where are they keeping Katara?

CAPTURED AGENT
In the crystal catacombs of Old Ba Sing Se -- deep beneath the palace!

INT. PRISON - THAT MOMENT

Long Feng is still being held prisoner. A Dai Li agent goes to speak with him, covertly.

DAI LI AGENT
The movements of all the generals and the Earth King have been plotted out step by step.

LONG FENG
Good. And the Fire Nation princess is cooperating?

DAI LI AGENT
Oh yes! More than cooperating... she's really taken charge. She's terrifying and inspirational at the same time. It's hard to explain.

Long Feng looks concerned.

INT. CRYSTAL CATACOMBS - PRISON CHAMBER

Zuko sits by himself in a corner, brooding. Katara paces a bit more energetically. Zuko doesn't speak.

KATARA
Why did they throw you in here? Oh wait, let me guess -- it's a trap. So that when Aang shows up to help me, you can finally have him in your little Fire Nation clutches.

Zuko looks up at her, then looks away wordlessly.

KATARA (cont'd)
You're a terrible person, you know that? Always following us, hunting the Avatar --trying to capture the world's last hope for peace!

No answer.

KATARA (cont'd)
But what do you care? You're the Fire Lord's son. Spreading war and violence and hatred is in your blood.

Zuko shakes his head dismissively.

ZUKO
You don't know what you're talking about.

KATARA
I don't?! How dare you -- you have no idea what this war has put me through -- me personally.

Katara sits down herself, and begins to look sad -- she holds her necklace, and tears well up in her eyes.

KATARA (cont'd)
The Fire Nation took my mother away from me.

A beat -- it's hard to tell what Zuko's reaction is. Then...

ZUKO
I'm sorry...

Now tears stream down her face, and Katara starts SOBBING.

ZUKO (cont'd)
That's something we have in common.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - LATER

Appa lands in a courtyard. Toph immediately jumps down and taps the ground, doing a "sonar" type move.

TOPH
Well, what do you know -- there is an ancient city down there, but it's deep.

Toph does a move creating a DEEP TUNNEL into the Earth.

SOKKA
We should split up. Aang, you go with Iroh to look for Katara and the angry jerk, no offense...

UNCLE
None taken.

SOKKA
... And I'll go with Toph to warn the Earth King about Azula's coup.

They split up -- Momo goes with Sokka and Toph.

INT. DARK TUNNEL - DAY

Uncle and Aang make their way deep underground. Uncle provides a light source with his Firebending, while Aang intermittently uses Earthbending to extend the tunnel.

AANG
So... Toph thinks you give pretty good advice. And great tea.

UNCLE
The key to both is proper aging. What's on your mind?

AANG
Well... I met with this guru who was supposed to help me master the Avatar state and control this great power... But to do it, I had to let go of someone I love. And I just couldn't.

UNCLE
Perfection and power are over-rated -- I think you were very wise to choose happiness and love.

AANG
But what happens if we can't save everyone and beat Azula? Without the Avatar state, what if I'm not powerful enough?

UNCLE
I don't know the answer. Sometimes life is like this dark tunnel. You can't always see the light at the end of the tunnel, but if you just keep moving...

BREAKTHROUGH! At that moment Aang's Earthbending opens the tunnel into...

INT. CRYSTAL COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

UNCLE
...You will come to a better place.

Uncle and Aang emerge into a great, vast and beautiful courtyard. It's a grand crystal plaza dating back to the ancient Old Ba Sing Se. The space is huge, with an underground stream running through it, being fed from above by a waterfall that cascades over many beautiful multi-colored crystals.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - LATER

Sokka and Toph spot General How in the distance.

SOKKA
There's General How!

Just then, they see Dai Li Agents surround him. The kids duck out of sight and watch what happens.

GENERAL HOW
What's going on here?

ARRESTING AGENT
You're under house arrest.

An agent PINS him to the wall, while another agent quickly MANACLES him -- they seal the deal with METAL SHACKLES.

SOKKA
The coup is happening right now -- we've got to warn the Earth King!

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - MONTAGE

We see each of the remaining four generals as they are apprehended and put under house arrest:

One general rises up on a small Earthbending elevator, only to be ambushed on his arrival by Dai Li Agents.

Another general approaches the Earthbender version of a rotating door -- he enters, but it STOPS with him inside it. It starts moving again, but when he comes out he is already manacled, and is immediately arrested and shackled.

A general comes down the outside stairs of a stately palace. Suddenly the stairs turn to a slope, and he slides down to the Dai Li agents waiting at the bottom to apprehend him.

Finally, a general in a state of disrobe lies face down as he receives a massage. Two imposing Dai Li agents step into the frame. When the general looks up to see what's going on, a stone manacle-fist immediately strikes and/or grabs him.

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sokka and Toph come running into the Earth King's throne room. He's on his throne, with Ty Lee and Mai next to him in Kyoshi warrior outfits. Sokka doesn't recognize them.

SOKKA
Thank goodness we're in time!

EARTH KING
In time for what?

TY LEE
Yeah, what are you in time for...

Ty Lee approaches Sokka, flirtatiously -- she gets right up to his face, and twirls his "wolf tail" in her fingertips.

TY LEE (cont'd)
...Cutie?

MOMO
(realizing)
(HISSING SOUNDS)

SOKKA
Uh... I'm kind of involved with Suki.

TY LEE
Who?

WHAM! Toph knocks Ty Lee away from Sokka.

TOPH
They're not the real Kyoshi warriors!

MAI
Sorry to disappoint you...

Mai launches some throwing weapons at Toph. Immediately Toph bends a slab of stone up, deflecting the weapons which ricochet off. Sokka turns to see Ty Lee who has tumbled back up next to him. Ty Lee attempts a few different chi-blocking strikes. But knowing the danger, Sokka ducks and weaves a few times, avoiding the attacks.

TY LEE
It's like we're dancing together.

Meanwhile, Toph has put Mai on the defensive, driving her back and throwing her off balance with a series of attacks. Sokka and Toph are holding their own, when...

BOSCO (O.S.)
(SCARED MOAN)

They turn to see: The Earth King, STIFF with fear -- near his head we see FAMILIAR FINGERNAILS, poised for a Firebending strike. We widen to reveal Azula.

AZULA
This fight... is over.

Seeing the Earth King in danger, the kids have no choice but to surrender. They drop their guard. Ty Lee does a cartwheel pass, blocking each of their chi as she goes. Azula releases the Earth King from her grip.

AZULA (cont'd)
Get them all out of my sight.

Mai and Ty Lee (assisted by a two Dai Li agents) escort Sokka, Toph, the Earth King and Bosco out of the room...

BOSCO
(SAD MOAN)

Azula is now completely alone in the throne room. She looks around her -- and smiles. Moments later, Long Feng enters followed by eight Dai Li agents. Long Feng walks up to Azula, while the Dai Li agents encircle them both.

LONG FENG
Now comes the part where I double-cross you. Dai Li, arrest the Fire Nation princess!

None of the Dai Li move.

LONG FENG (cont'd)
I said -- arrest her.

They stay frozen -- they are not sure what to do.

LONG FENG (cont'd)
What's wrong with you?!

AZULA
It's because they haven't made up their minds -- they're waiting to see how this is going to end.

LONG FENG
What are you talking about?

AZULA
I can see your whole history in your eyes. You were born with nothing -- so you've had to struggle and connive and claw your way to power. But true power -- the divine right to rule -- is something you're born with.

Azula indicates the empty throne.

AZULA (cont'd)
(re: the Dai Li)
The fact is, they don't know which one of us is going to be sitting in that throne... and which one is going to be bowing down. But I know. And you know.

Now Azula makes her move. Dai Li agents get out of her way as she cooly strolls over to the throne and sits down. She's so comfortable in that position.

AZULA (cont'd)
Well?

It's like a staring contest -- and Long Feng BLINKS. He's broken -- he BOWS to Azula.

LONG FENG
You've beaten me at my own game.

AZULA
Don't flatter yourself -- you were never even a player.

She nods to the agents, and they close in and arrest him.

INT. CRYSTAL CATACOMBS - PRISON CHAMBER

Katara and Zuko have warmed up to each other slightly.

KATARA
I'm sorry I yelled at you before.

ZUKO
It doesn't matter.

KATARA
It's just that for so long now, whenever I would imagine the face of the enemy -- it was your face.

ZUKO
My face -- I see.

He touches his scar self-consciously.

KATARA
No, no, that's not what I meant--

ZUKO
It's okay. I used to think this scar marked me. The mark of the banished prince, cursed to chase the Avatar forever. But lately... I've realized I'm free to determine my own destiny.

He looks down.

ZUKO (cont'd)
Even if I'll never be free of my mark.

Katara thinks for a second.

KATARA
Maybe you could be free of it.

ZUKO
What?

KATARA
I have healing abilities.

ZUKO
It's a scar -- it can't be healed.

Katara reveals the special vial that Pakku gave her.

KATARA
This is water from the spirit oasis at the North pole -- it has special properties, so I've been saving it for something important. I don't know if it would work, but...

Zuko closes his eyes. Katara gently touches his scar with her hand. At that moment, they are interrupted as an OPENING is Earthbent in the crystal wall. Uncle and Aang enter.

KATARA (cont'd)
Aang!

She runs over to Aang and hugs him, overjoyed.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. CRYSTAL CATACOMBS - PRISON CHAMBER - MOMENTS LATER

KATARA
Aang, I knew you would come.

While Katara and Aang still hug, Zuko turns to Uncle.

ZUKO
Uncle, I don't understand. What are you doing with the Avatar?!

AANG
Saving you, that's what.

Zuko gets up and moves toward Aang, but Uncle holds him back-- Zuko and Aang hold each other's stares.

UNCLE
Prince Zuko, it's time we talked.
(to Aang)
Go help your other friends... We'll catch up with you.

Aang bows -- and then exits. Katara looks at Zuko for just a lingering instant before she follows Aang. Now Uncle and Zuko are alone.

ZUKO
(soft)
Why, Uncle?

UNCLE
You are not the man you used to be, Zuko. You are stronger and wiser and freer than you have ever been. And now you have come to the crossroads of your destiny. It's time for you to choose...

Zuko knows he's right--

UNCLE (cont'd)
It's time for you to choose GOOD!

At that moment, crystal spikes JUT UP from the floors and walls, imprisoning Uncle in a puzzle-like CRYSTAL CAGE! An opening forms on the opposite wall, as two Dai Li agents enter, followed by Azula.

AZULA
I expected this kind of treachery from Uncle, but Zuko -- Prince Zuko -- you're a lot of things, but you're not a traitor. Are you?

ZUKO
Release him immediately!

Zuko raises an arm to send a Firebending attack, but the Dai Li agent Earthbends crystals to PIN Zuko's arm.

AZULA
It's not too late for you, Zuko. You can still redeem yourself.

UNCLE
The kind of redemption she offers is not for you.

AZULA
Why don't you let him decide, Uncle? I need you Zuko. I've plotted every move of this day -- this glorious day in Fire Nation history -- and the only way we win is together. At the end of this day you will have your honor back -- you will have father's love -- you will have everything you want.

UNCLE
Zuko, I'm begging you. Look into your heart and see what it is that you truly want...

Azula nods to the Dai Li agent to release Zuko.

AZULA
You are free to choose.

She turns her back, and exits the chamber.

INT. CRYSTAL COURTYARD - LATER

Katara and Aang emerge into the courtyard.

KATARA
We've gotta find Sokka and Toph!

Just then, BLUE LIGHTNING crackles through the courtyard, lighting up the facets of all the beautiful crystals, as Azula enters behind them.

Katara reacts quickly, drawing water from the stream (or waterfall) and sending a sheet of ice beneath Azula's feet. Azula leaps up to a crystal ledge, releasing another attack at Katara and Aang. Aang Earthbends the ledge back into the wall, causing Azula to fall, but she reacts quickly, grabbing another crystal protrusion as she falls, and gymnastically vaulting herself to safety.

Perhaps we see another exchange or two between the threesome. (If we do, the feeling should be (if anything) that Azula vs. Katara and Aang is a close and balanced match -- that way, when Zuko shows up, his choice will tip the balance.)

As the three get tangled in some close hand-to hand melee, suddenly a RED fireball blasts near them -- it's unclear for whom it was intended. They all look up to see Zuko, standing at the entrance to the Crystal Courtyard. For a beat they all wonder -- we all wonder -- which side has he chosen?

Then Zuko makes his choice clear, as his face becomes angry again and he unleashes a furious barrage of fire that is clearly intended for Aang. Azula smiles.

INT. PRISON - THAT MOMENT

This is the same "Earthbender proof" prison that Long Feng was being held in. Now Sokka, Toph and Momo are here, with the Earth King.

TOPH
(sotto)
See any Dai Li agents nearby?

SOKKA
(sotto)
Nope -- all clear.

Toph does some act of metal bending that frees them.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Let's go!

EARTH KING
I'm not leaving without Bosco!

They rush out of the cell together.

INT. CRYSTAL CATACOMBS - THAT MOMENT

The four way fight we have all been waiting for, in all its entertaining combinations. Aang & Katara vs. Zuko & Azula. Awesome crystal-crazy location. Blue and red fire reflecting in the various crystal surfaces, etc.

Katara using the stream and waterfall for some Waterbending action. Aang using Airbending, Waterbending, and even a little Crystalbending when it comes in handy.

During an early exchange between Zuko and Katara:

KATARA
I thought you had changed.

ZUKO
I have changed--

He still sends an attack at her.

(This is a lengthier awesome fight scene than this too brief description might indicate -- the bulk of the fight should be this scene.)

INT. THRONE ROOM - LATER

Ty Lee and Mai are there, now in their regular outfits. Ty Lee is trying to get Bosco to do a circus trick.

TY LEE
Come on, it's easy. You just walk on your front paws instead of your rear ones. Like this...

Ty Lee demonstrates, walking on her hands. Suddenly, the ground beneath her hands literally seizes her hands, and we reveal Toph has entered.

TOPH
That is a nice trick.

Ty Lee struggles to get free, but can't. Sokka and Toph look like they are about to take on Mai, but Mai dismisses the idea altogether.

MAI
Just take the bear.

EARTH KING
Bosco!

Reunified with Bosco, they all leave.

INT. CRYSTAL COURTYARD - THAT MOMENT

The conclusion of the fight. At a climactic moment, Azula is up close to Katara, about to deliver a deadly lightning blast -- but Aang suddenly air blasts Azula back and out of the way.

But before Azula loses the charge, she realizes Katara is standing in the stream -- Azula releases the lightning into the stream, which travels through the water and SHOCKS Katara!

As Aang sees this happening, he is distracted for a moment and off guard as Zuko sweeps his feet, sending him flying back and to the ground. Aang, now on the ground, looks over at Katara who is also on the ground. Azula and Zuko loom above them. Things are looking very bleak.

Zuko sends a powerful blast at Aang, who scrambles out of the way. Aang sees Azula slowly approaching the fallen Katara. He sends an Earthbending wave across the ground to hit Azula -- but it suddenly stops, as a Dai Li agent enters, and sends the Earthbending wave back at Aang. Soon several more Dai Li agents are entering the courtyard -- Aang and Katara were already losing when it was just Azula and Zuko, so now the odds are beginning to look overwhelmingly bad.

AANG
There's too many...

He looks back at Katara, still in danger, but still scrambling to survive.

GURU (V.O.)
The only way is to let her go...

AANG
(to himself)
I'm sorry Katara...

Aang performs a rapid sequence of Earthbending moves, lifting crystals all around him to form a protective crystal shell. He closes his eyes to meditate like he did with the guru.

INT. AANG'S HEADSPACE - THAT MOMENT

Instantly, Aang is back where he left off with the Guru. This time (in the same visual as 2.19) He turns his back on Katara -- and crosses the bridge to the giant Avatar State version of himself. We cross cut this with...

INT. CRYSTAL COURTYARD - THAT MOMENT

Within his crystal cocoon, Aang's eyes and tattoos begin glowing. Zuko steps back, just as Aang explodes out of his cocoon, and begins rising up off the ground on a pedestal of pure energy. The many Dai Li agents are left in fear and awe. The heroic and epic Avatar theme music rises with Aang. He is embracing his destiny as a hero, since it will be the only way to save the day. As we watch his powerful form rise heroically...

BLAM!

He is suddenly shot from behind by a fierce and focussed bolt of blue lightning. We see Azula standing behind him, smiling.

INT. AANG'S HEADSPACE - THAT MOMENT

The Avatar State version of himself fades and vanishes, and the bridge crumbles beneath him, and he begins to fall...

INT. CRYSTAL CATACOMBS - THAT MOMENT

Mortally wounded, Aang begins coming out of the Avatar State and begins to fall... this is all in tragic slow motion. (Inspiration for this scene: the last scene in "The Professional" as Leon slowly falls to the ground.)

When he hits the ground, normal motion begins. Katara (Azula's attention now diverted to Aang) is able to get up and Waterbends herself up the stream to be by Aang's side.

He is completely unresponsive. She sits on the ground and cradles him in her arms as Azula and Zuko close in on them. Fear wells up in Katara's eyes as it seems completely hopeless. Then at the last moment, there's an explosion of lightning and fire between them, as Uncle Iroh bursts onto the scene!

Zuko stops. But Azula takes another step toward them -- Uncle BREATHES FIRE at her, causing Azula to dive away from his attack. He turns to Katara.

UNCLE
You've got to get out of here -- I'll hold them off as long as I can.

With Uncle providing cover, Katara escapes with Aang in her hands. Maybe she uses Waterbending to ride up the Waterfall.

EXT. PALACE GROUNDS - MOMENTS LATER

Katara emerges from the tunnel carrying Aang, just as Appa arrives with Sokka, Toph, the Earth King and Bosco. They see Aang is unconscious.

EXT. SKY - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone watches tensely, like a family watching a surgeon do an operation on their loved one, as Katara tries to heal Aang.

She removes the spirit water vial from around her neck, and bends the water out. It SPARKLES (or has some other extra-special effect. Katara bends it around Aang, bends it around his wound. Finally, Aang comes to -- though again he is weak and groggy. In a shot stolen directly from episode 1.01, The first thing Aang sees as he opens his eyes is Katara. Then there is a lot of smiling and crying and hugging.

As Appa crosses over the outer wall of Ba Sing Se, the Earth King looks back.

He hangs his head. They fly off into the darkness.

INT. PALACE - THRONE ROOM - LATER

Azula sits in the throne, and Zuko stands nearby, looking torn.

AZULA
We've done it, Zuko -- it's taken a hundred years, but the Fire Nation has conquered Ba Sing Se.

Zuko hangs his head.

ZUKO
I betrayed Uncle.

AZULA
No -- he betrayed you.
(beat)
Zuko, when you return home father will welcome you as a war hero.

ZUKO
But I don't have the Avatar. What if father doesn't restore my honor...

Azula gets up and approaches her brother, and actually seems affectionate towards him.

AZULA
He doesn't need to, Zuko. Today you restored your own honor.

This really hits home with Zuko -- he looks away and closes his eyes tight -- he doubts his choice. Off Zuko's pained expression...

END OF SHOW